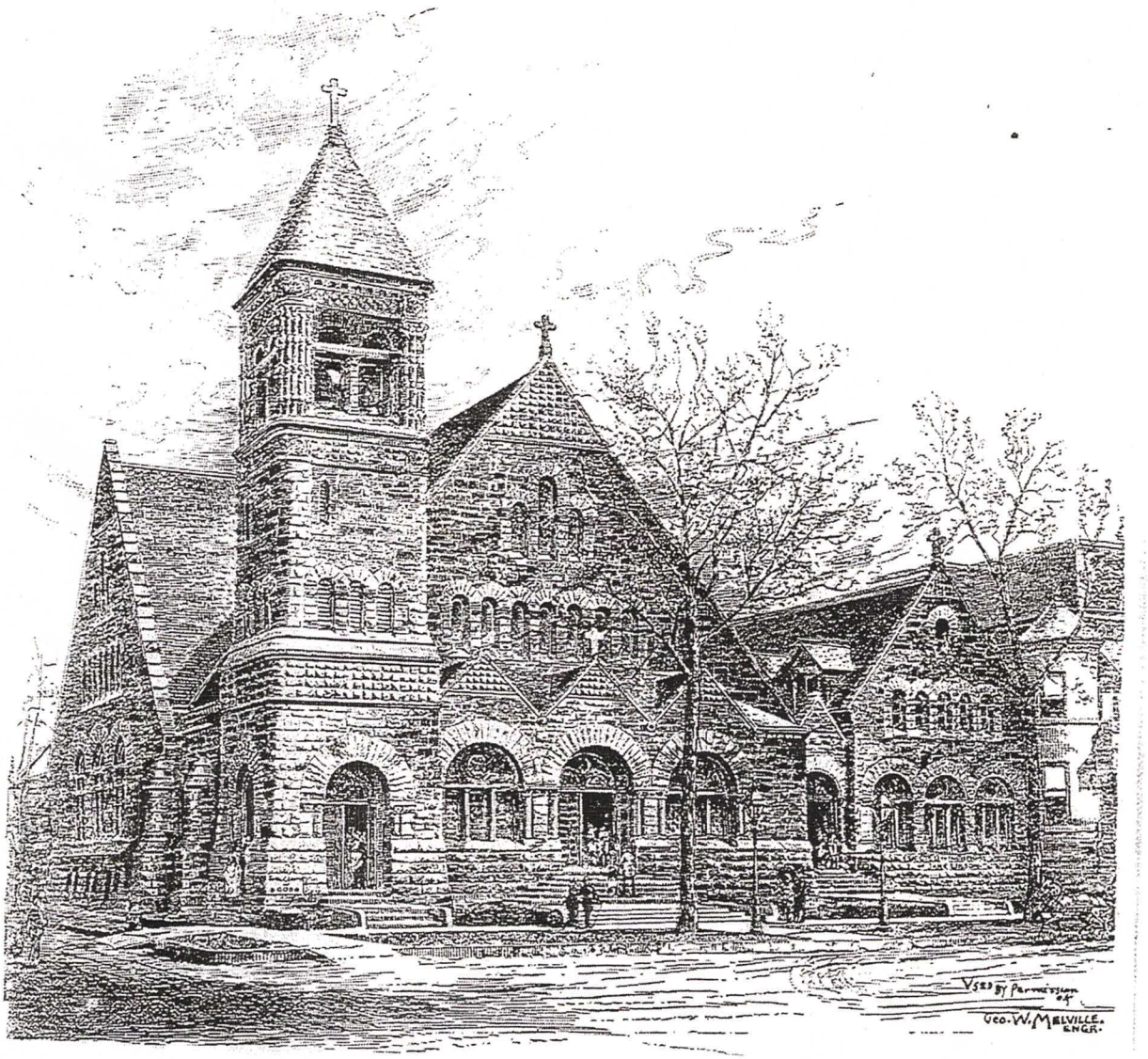
PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION



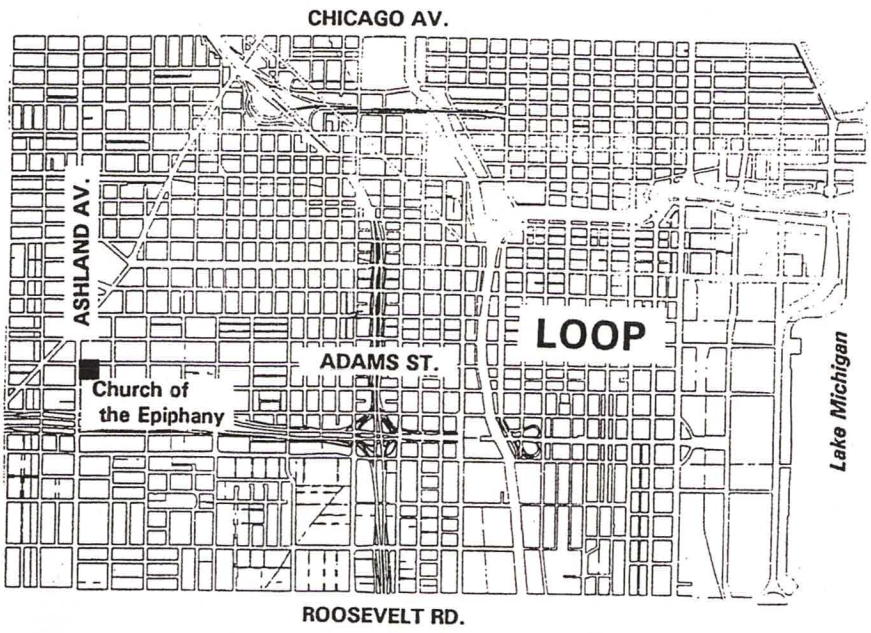
Church of the Epiphany

201 S. Ashland Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on June 14, 1995

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Valerie B. Jarrett, Commissioner



The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The Commission makes recommendations to the City Council after careful consideration. The process begins with an extensive staff study, summarized in this report, which discusses the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark.

The next step--a preliminary determination by the Commission that the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration--is important because it gives the Commission the authority to review city permits for the property during the remainder of the designation process.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

COVER: An 1893 drawing of the Church of the Epiphany. ABOVE: The church is located at the corner of Ashland Avenue and Adams Street, two miles west of the Loop.

Church of the Epiphany

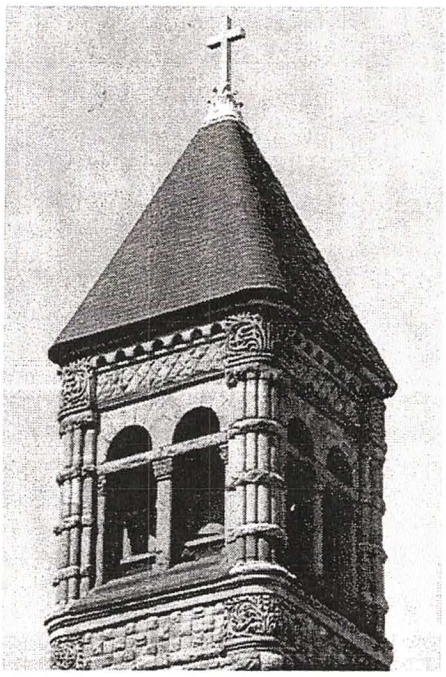
201 S. Ashland Ave.

Date: 1885-86
Architect: Burling & Whitehouse

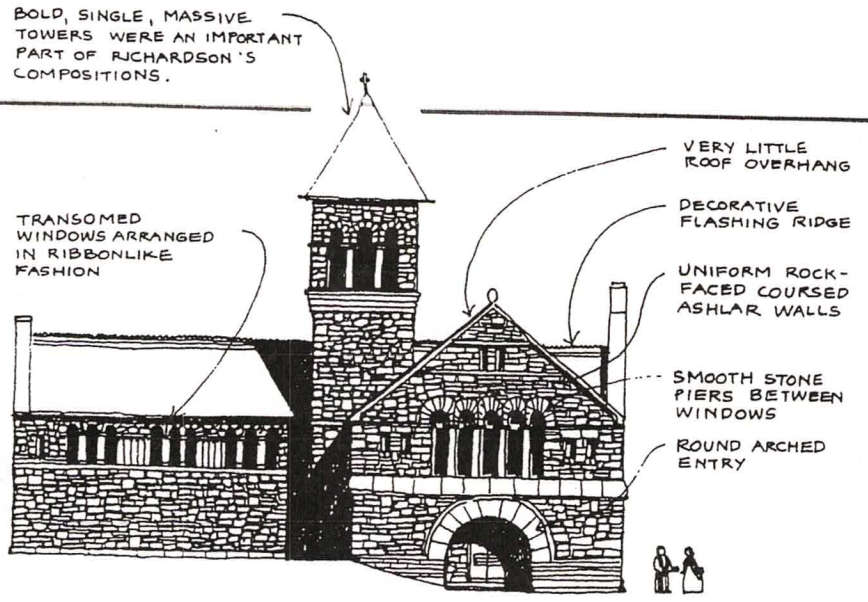
The Church of the Epiphany is the city's best example of a Richardsonian Romanesque-style religious building. It also is notable for being one of the first buildings in Chicago to be designed in this style that became dominant in the last part of the 19th century.

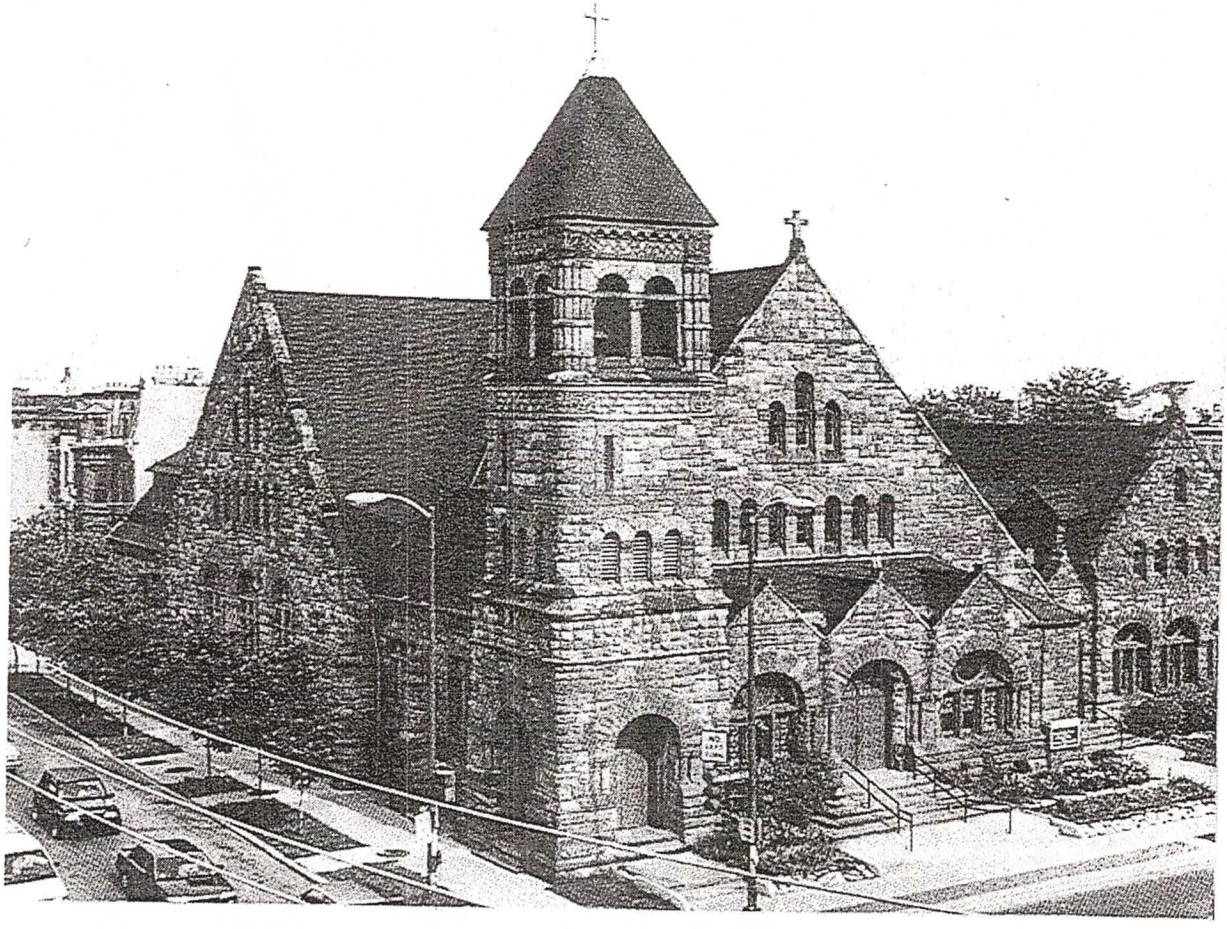
From the time of its construction, the Church of the Epiphany has been acknowledged as one of the city's outstanding architectural statements–both for the design of its sandstone exterior and for its open-truss roof interior, a richly appointed space that the *AIA Guide to Chicago* has referred to as a "visual feast of Victorian polychromy."

Together with the rowhouses of the adjacent Jackson Boulevard Historic District, the Church of the Epiphany anchors one of the few surviving concentrations of late-19th century architecture on the city's Near West Side.



The tower of the church–with its bold, corner columns, foliate ornament, and decorative stonework–is a distinctive element.


BOLD, SINGLE, MASSIVE TOWERS WERE AN IMPORTANT PART OF RICHARDSON'S COMPOSITIONS.
VERY LITTLE ROOF OVERHANG
DECORATIVE FLASHING RIDGE
TRANSOMED WINDOWS ARRANGED IN RIBBONLIKE FASHION
UNIFORM ROCK-FACED COURSED ASHLAR WALLS
SMOOTH STONE PIERS BETWEEN WINDOWS
ROUND ARCHED ENTRY

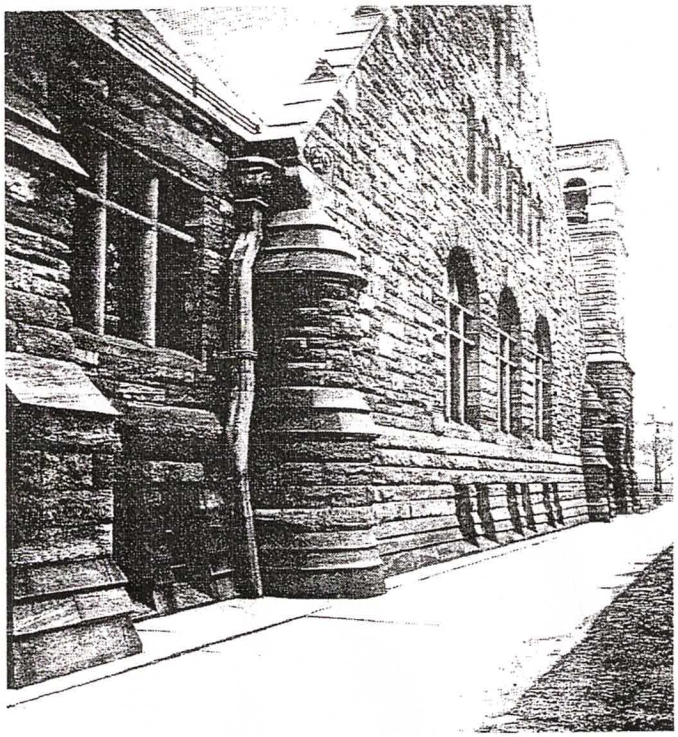


The Church of the Epiphany (above, in a 1994 photo) is one of the city's finest examples of Richardsonian Romanesque, an architectural style that was extremely popular during the last part of the 19th century. Top: an annotated drawing of the Ames Memorial Library (1877-78) in North Easton, Massachusetts, which was designed by H.H. Richardson, the "father" of this style.

The Exterior: A Premier Example of Richardsonian Romanesque

The church and its neighboring building–formerly a chapel and now a school and parish house–were built in 1885-86. Its corner tower was not completed, however, until 1888.

The building is constructed of Lake Superior sandstone, a red-brown stone quarried in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The large, rough-textured stone blocks emphasize the thickness of the walls, whose sloped bases convey a sense that the building is firmly rooted to the earth. Other exterior features, such as the building's broad proportions, semicircular arches, clustered columns, checkered patterns of stone,

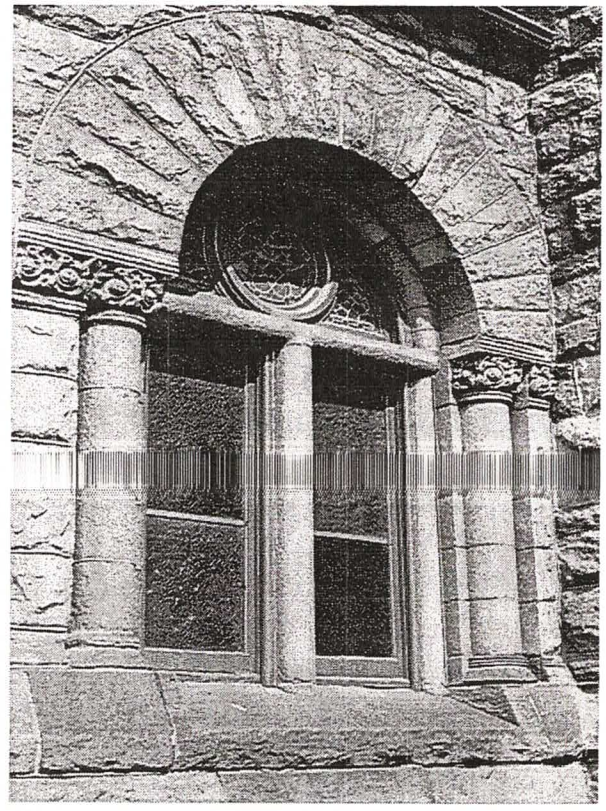


The walls of the church are built in a red-brown Lake Superior sandstone. Flared foundations, projecting buttresses, and rough wall surfaces are dominant characteristics of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture.

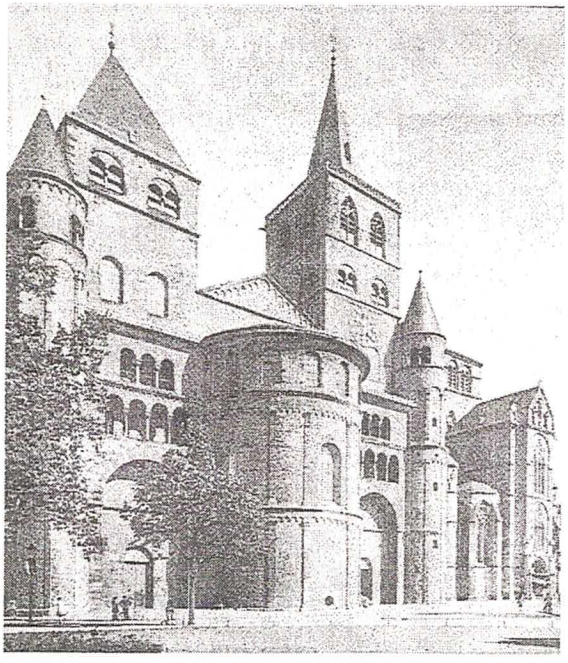
decorative details, and deeply recessed window and door openings are classic characteristics of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

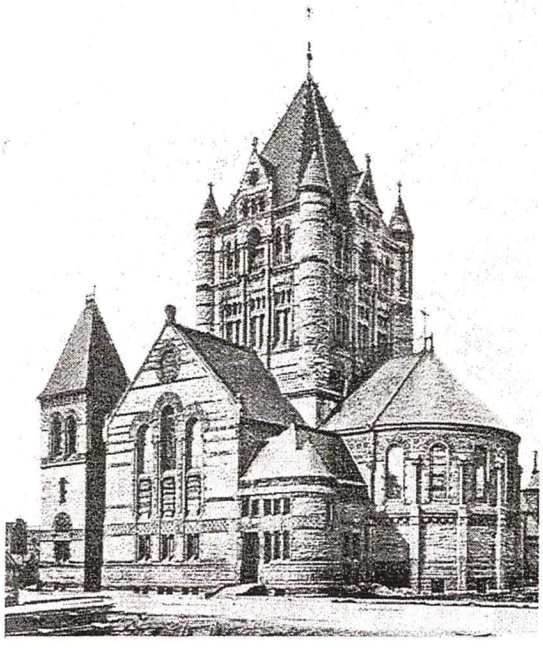
This style of architecture is often considered to be the first "distinctly American" style, and was influential with European architects.[1] Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-86), an East Coast architect, created the style when he adapted the "Romanesque" style of 11th and 12th-century European buildings (a style which had, in turn, been based on elements of late-Roman and Early-Christian architecture) to modern 19th-century uses.

Instead of borrowing from many different sources–as most Victorian architecture had done–Richardson used a single design vocabulary to create a dramatically different, modern style of architecture. By using simplified ornamental details, he emphasized the massive forms of his buildings and their materials.



Round arches, paired columns, and carved relief sculpture are features of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture, as seen in this detail of the Church of the Epiphany.





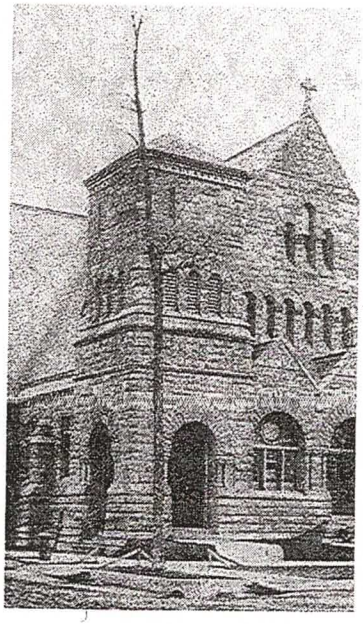
The Richardsonian Romanesque style of 19th-century architecture was based on designs from the 11th and 12th centuries, such as the Cathedral of Trier, Germany, which was completed in 1070 A.D. (above, left). One of the earliest of this country's Richardsonian Romanesque buildings is Trinity Church in Boston (above right, 1873-77). Below, a painting of H.H. Richardson, who formulated the style.

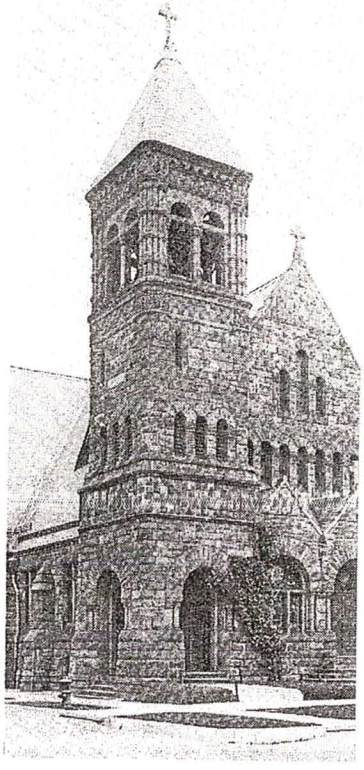
Among Richardson's early, influential designs were Trinity Church in Boston (1873-77), libraries in Woburn (1876-79) and North Easton, Mass. (1877-78), and the Allegheny County Courthouse in Pittsburgh (1883-88). The designs of these buildings were widely published in architectural journals in the U.S. and abroad.

In this country, the Richardsonian Romanesque style can be found in hundreds of cities and towns, particularly in courthouses, libraries, and other public buildings. In Chicago, the earliest buildings of this style date to 1884-85, when four buildings were designed: the original Art Institute, the Glessner House, the Marshall Field Warehouse Store, and the Church of the Epiphany (see pp. 19-21).

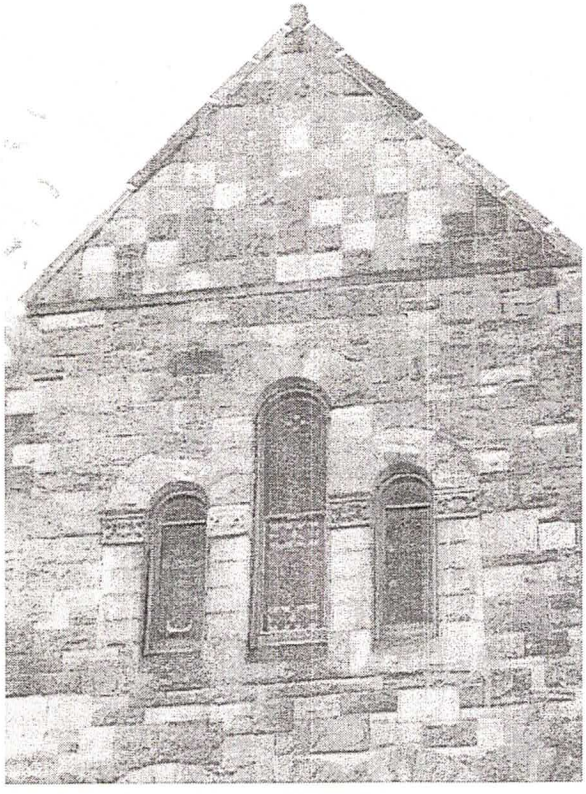
The principal designer of the Church of the Epiphany was Francis Whitehouse (1848-1938), a partner of the firm of Burling & Whitehouse.[2] An academically trained architect, Whitehouse had studied the works of both Richardson and his historic precedents. He had joined Edward Burling's (1819-92) firm by 1878, and became a partner in 1883. (Among their other commissions was the Nickerson House, a Chicago Landmark at 40 E. Erie St.)

The selection of Burling & Whitehouse may have been influenced by Burling's earlier work on St. James Episcopal Church (675 N. Wabash; 1855 and 1873), as





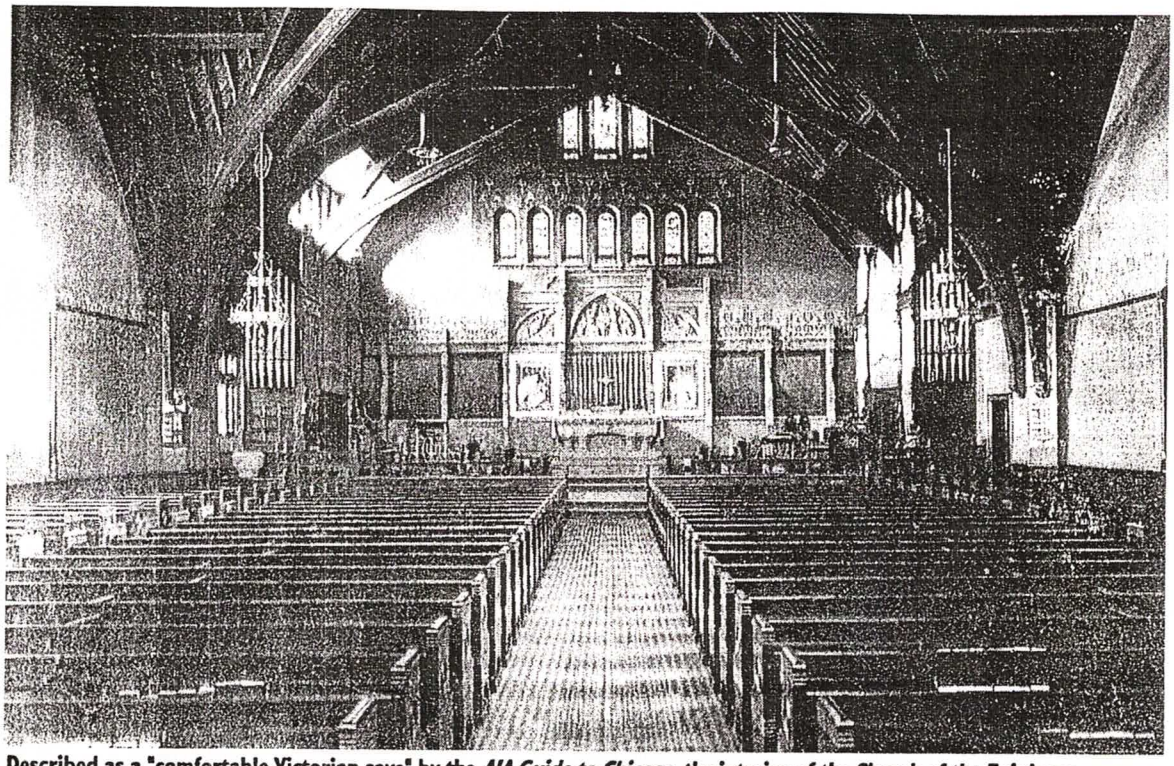
The original design of the tower of the Church of the Epiphany was taller and more complex, as seen in this 1885 engraving (left). Although construction began according to this design—note the narrow top window in the center photograph—it was left unfinished for two years. When construction renewed in 1887, a shorter tower was substituted for the original design (right).



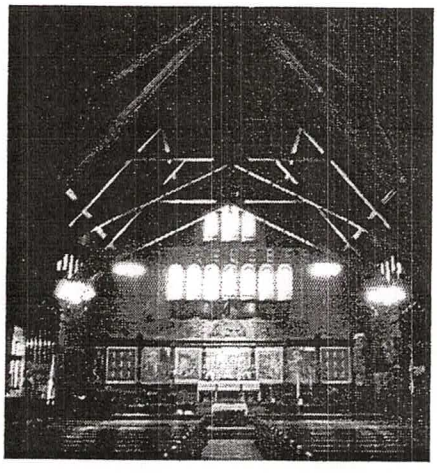
Bold geometric forms, such as the gables on the Church of the Epiphany, are prominent elements of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Masonry details, seen here in the alternating rough and smooth finishes of the sandstone, give further visual interest.

well as the fact that Whitehouse was the son of the former bishop of the Episcopal Diocese, the Rev. Henry Whitehouse. These connections apparently helped the firm get later commissions for other Episcopal churches in Chicago, Kansas City, and St. Louis, which also were built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. None survives.

It is unclear exactly why the architects and the church leaders decided on the Richardsonian Romanesque style, which was a marked departure from traditional Gothic and Victorian church designs. This style was just coming into vogue in the mid-1880s; its novelty would have been appealing to residents of the city's fashionable Near West Side.



Described as a "comfortable Victorian cave" by the *AIA Guide to Chicago*, the interior of the Church of the Epiphany conveys a sense of awe and dignity. It is striking for its broad, column-free space, its elaborate open-truss ceiling , and the richness of its finishes and materials. A comparison of interior views, taken in the 1890s (above) and in 1995 (below), shows that most of the original features remain.



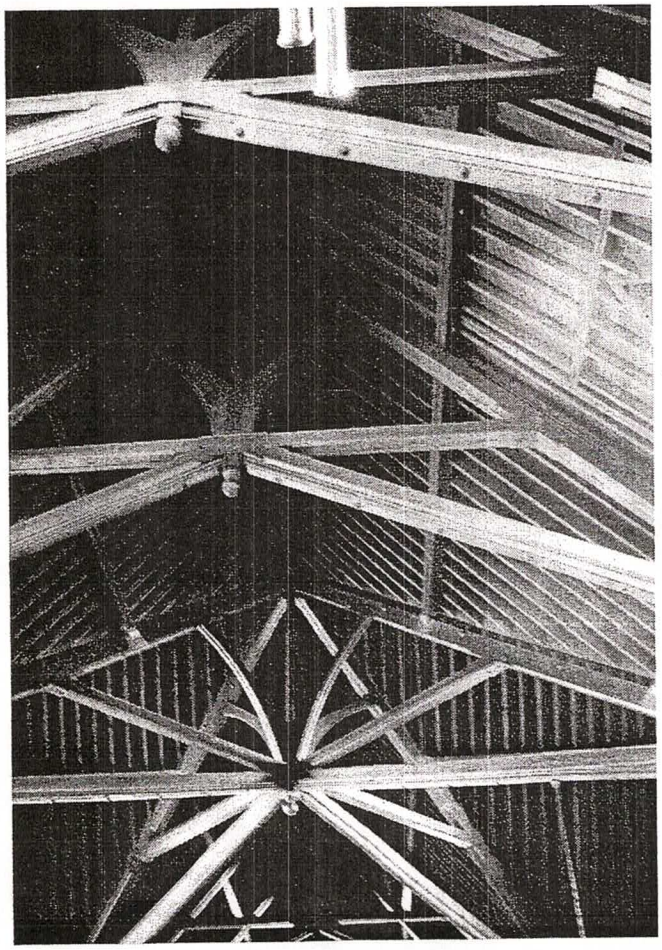
The Interior: A Well-Preserved Example of Victorian Design

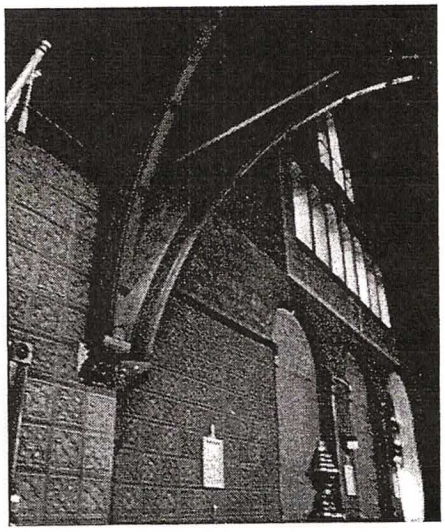
The rough nature of the building's sandstone exterior stands in marked contrast to the richness of its interior. Built of the highest quality materials (cherry wood, decorative terra cotta, carved stone, and glass mosaics), it is one of the best preserved Victorian-era church interiors in the city.

A dominant feature is the open wood trusswork that supports the church's column-free, broad-span roof. The trusswork accentuates the height and spaciousness of the interior, making it one of the city's most dramatic church interiors. Particularly elaborate is the interlacing trusswork that supports the center portion of the roof, at the short cross axis.

The interior decor is typically Victorian, combining a wide variety of materials, textures, and colors that contribute to its dark, but overall warm feeling. Natural light enters through the round-arched windows in the front and rear of the church, as well as through small dormers and arched windows in the side walls. This soft light, filtered through stained glass, casts a warm glow through the enormous space and contributes to the quiet mood of the church interior.

The stained glass in the dormers and upper arches is original; those in the lower arches are replacements for windows stolen in the early 1970s. Two of the new

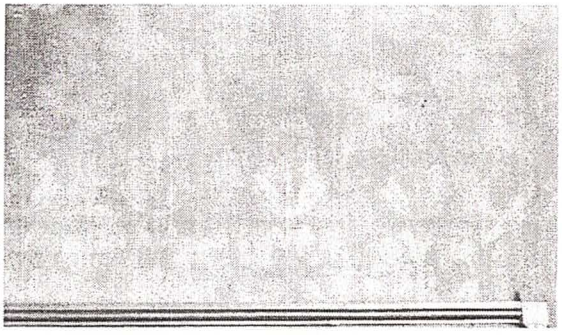


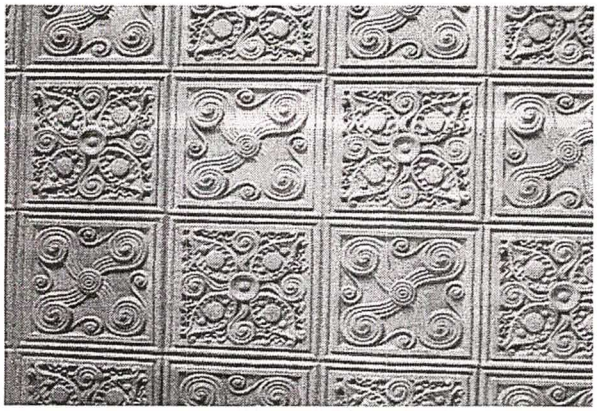


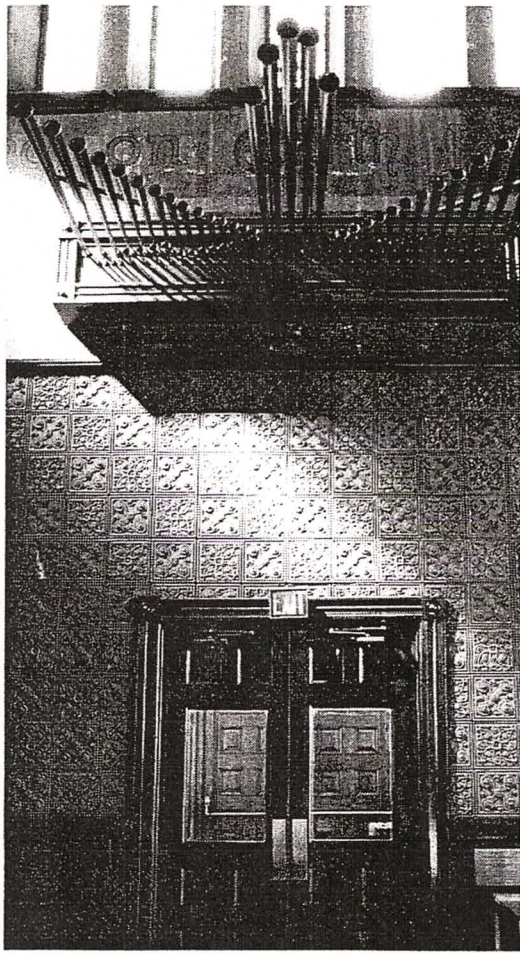
The church's exposed roof trusses dramatically emphasize the height and spaciousness of the interior (left). Stone corbels in the walls support the trusses, allowing a column-free interior (right).

windows on the north side of the nave were designed by Edgar Miller in 1980, and are among the last works of that noted Chicago artist.

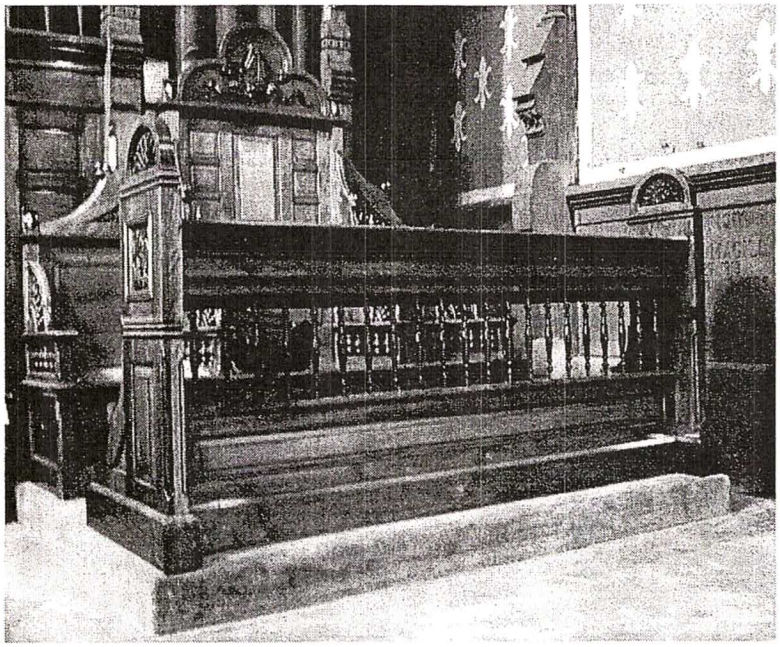
The treatment of the walls is characteristic of the interior's richness of materials. The lower four and a half feet of the walls are finished with wood wainscoting. Above that, and stretching another 11 feet up the surface of the walls, are red unglazed tiles of intricately detailed terra cotta, which the *AIA Guide to Chicago* noted, are placed "in alternating squares of fluid ribbons and pods that seem to have been squeezed from a pastry tube."[3] These tiles were manufactured by True, Brunkhorst & Co., one of the city's earliest terra cotta manufacturers.

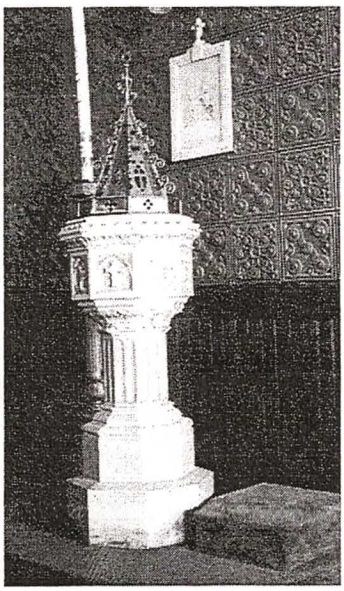






Richly decorated interiors were an important aspect of 19th-century church decor. The walls of the Church of the Epiphany include a floor-to-ceiling sequence of wood wainscoting, terra-cotta tiles, and stenciled plaster (as seen surrounding one of the front doors, right). The unglazed red tiles are the city's only known example of terra cotta interior walls (bottom, left). The foliated forms of the original wall stencilling can still be seen under later layers of paint (top, left).





The church's original cherry furniture includes a bishop's chair (above) and its railing (detail, above right). The marble baptismal font (right) is the only surviving feature of the original 1868 church.

The use of ornamental terra cotta on interior walls, which is highly unusual, is one of the more distinctive features of the Church of the Epiphany.

Above these terra-cotta tiles, on the portion of the walls that is plastered, there had formerly been decorative stencils. The "ghosts" of these multicolor stencils can still be seen through the subsequent layers of paint. (These stencils, which illustrated plant forms, are of roughly the same period as the rich stencilwork that adorns St. James Episcopal Cathedral.)

The wood furnishings of the church are original, including the carved cherry pews, choir stalls, pulpit, railings, and organ screen. The "Ferrand and Votey, with Austin console" organ was one of the city's largest–and first electric–organs at the time of its installation in 1892.

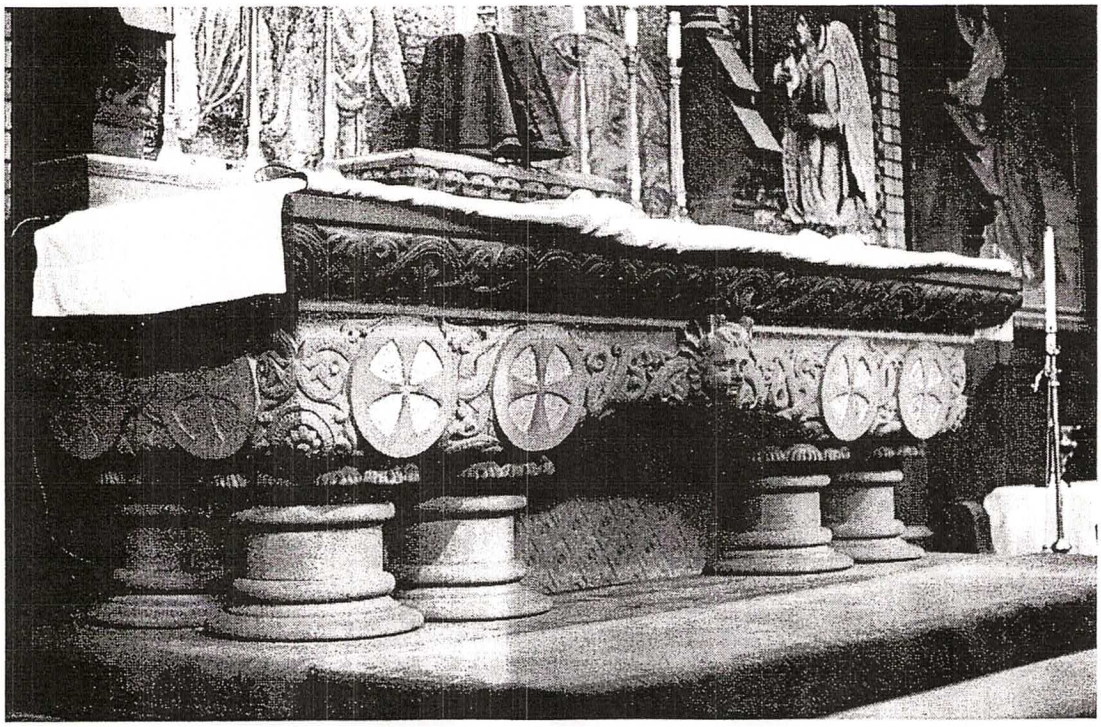
A Gothic style, marble baptismal font, which is located near the front entrance, is the sole surviving feature of the original Church of the Epiphany, which was built in 1868 at the corner of Throop and Adams streets. When that church was replaced by the current building in 1885, the font was moved here.

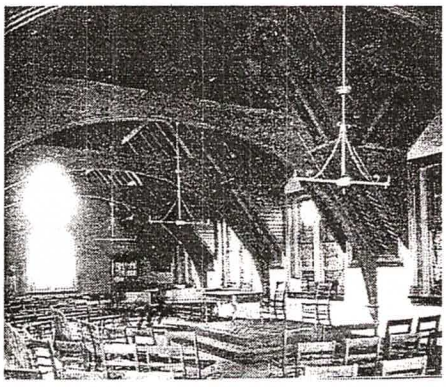
Another major focus of the interior is a carved stone altar table and 23-foot-tall altar screen. The altar features intricate carvings and a massive, Romanesque-style arch, supported by polished granite paired-columns. The altar was designed to function as a crypt for the original rector, Rev. Theodore Morrison. However, he left the Church of the Epiphany before his death and is not buried here. (The crypt stood empty until March 1995, when the cremated remains of the wife of a more recent rector were interred here.)

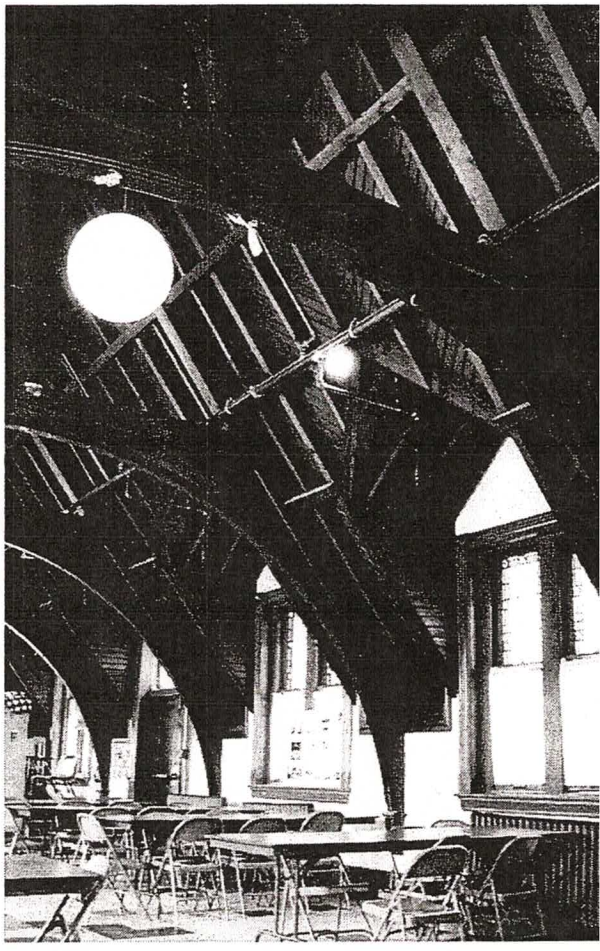
The altar screen (or retable) is divided into three sections. Commemorative plaques occupy its lowest level; five Venetian-style glass mosaics are located immediately above the altar table; and three carved stone reliefs dominate its upper level. The two mosaics of angels were made in 1885 by Tiffany & Co. of New York. The other three mosaics were added in 1896-97 and 1912. The central stone carving depicts the "Epiphany," the adoration of the infant Christ by the Magi.

The altar and its altar screen are a focal point of the interior. The luminescent quality of the glass mosaics contrasts with the dark wood tones of the remainder of the church.

One of the glass mosaics (left) made by Tiffany & Co., and installed in 1886. A high-relief stone tableau (below) depicts the Epiphany. The altar table (bottom) features exceptional stone carving that combines Romanesque and Byzantine motifs.







A second-floor meeting room is the only portion of the parish house interior that retains its historic integrity. The only significant change between 1890 (above) and today (right) is the replacement of one set of windows with a door.

Another surviving interior space is the meetir room on the second floor of the parish house. Its roof like that of the church, is supported by exposed rafter Most of the room's original woodwork survives, although a door leading to a fire escape has replaced one of windows. (The other interior spaces in the parish house are no longer intact.)

With the notable exception of the stolen stair glass, the interior of the church retains an exceptional high degree of integrity, conveying a complete picture the building's original form, detail, and finishes. It provides a rare opportunity to experience the visual richness of this era of interior architectural design.

History of the Near West Side

The original Church of the Epiphany was built in 1868, at the corner of Throop and Adams streets, a few blocks east of the present church and facing Jefferson (now Skinner) Park. By the mid-1880s, however, the congregation had outgrown this small frame structure, and began constructing the current stone church at Ashland and Adams.

The history of the Near West Side as a residential community dates to the 1860s, when it began to develop into one of the city's exclusive residential neighborhoods.

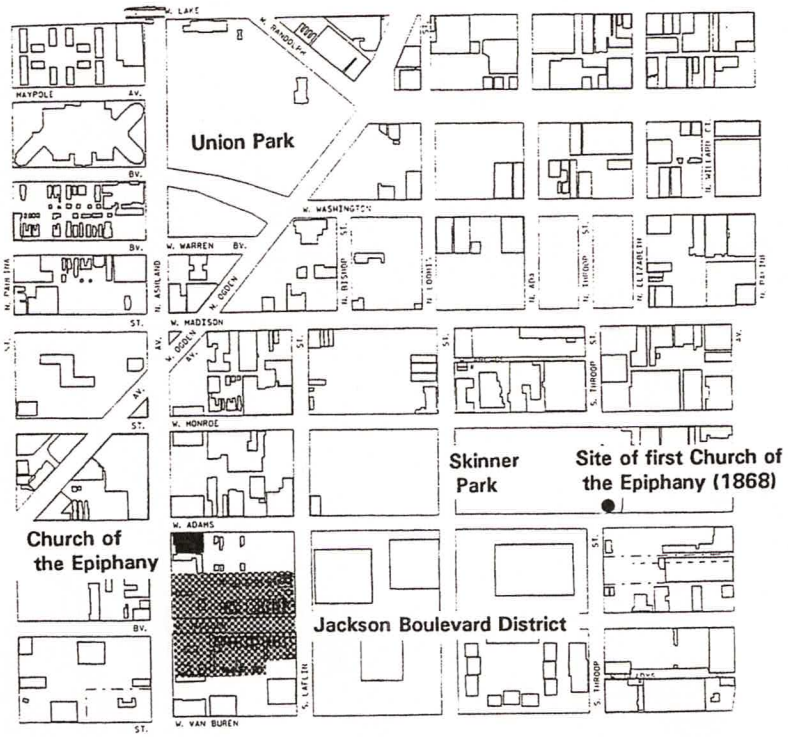
The original Church of the Epiphany was a "Carpenter Gothic" style structure, built in 1868. It stood a few blocks east of the present building.

One impetus was the departure of a major stockyard to the Bridgeport neighborhood; another was the area's proximity to Union Park, a "resort park" at Ashland Avenue and Washington Boulevard that featured a lagoon, bandshell, and landscaped grounds.

The area's most fashionable residences were bui along Ashland (formerly Reuben Street), which had bee widened in 1864 into a boulevard. Among its early residents was noted politician Carter Henry Harrison (U.S. Congress, 1874-79; Mayor, 1879-93), whose home- since demolished--stood one block south of the church.

The area's east-west streets, such as Adams, Monroe, and Washington, were developed with smaller,

This c.1890 photo, looking east on Adams Street from Ashland Avenue, shows the residential character of the area at the time of the church's construction. The house on the right was owned by the Wilson family, prominent members of the church. They later donated the house to the church. It was demolished and replaced by the present Cathedral Shelter building in 1957.



The Church of the Epiphany and the Jackson Boulevard Historic District (shaded) are among the few surviving 19th-century landmarks on the Near West Side, when this area was one of the city's most prosperous residential districts.

but still elegant, residences. One of the few surviving buildings from this era is the Abraham Groesbeck House at 1304 W. Washington Blvd. (1869). Among the other area residents was Mary Todd Lincoln, widow of the slain President, who lived in the 1200-block of Washington Boulevard.

While the Great Fire of 1871 spared this area, within a few years its status as the city's fashionable area was eclipsed by the newly rebuilt North and South sides. Although still well-to-do, most of the subsequent housing on the West Side was built for less wealthy residents, including the area adjacent to the current church (now the Jackson Boulevard Historic District), which was subdivided in 1873 and developed in the 1880s and '90s. The city's professional baseball club, the Chicago Cubs (then called the White Stockings), moved to this area in 1884. They remained at the West Side grounds (Throop

The Jackson Boulevard Historic District (seen here in a c. 1960 view) is located immediately southeast of the Church of the Epiphany. The ornate single-family residences, which were built around the time of the church, illustrate the variety of Victorian architectural styles used in the late 19th century.

St. and Congress Ave.) until 1916, when they moved to Wrigley Field on the North Side.

Although the area continued to develop, its fall from the ranks of the elite was as fast as its rise. By the turn of the century, the introduction of streetcar and elevated rail lines had made the area more accessible and, consequently, less desirable as a residential community. By 1910, the elegant houses on Ashland were being replaced with warehouses and industrial buildings.

In 1921, the Church of the Epiphany was briefly named the cathedral for the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Illinois, after the former cathedral at Washington Blvd. and Peoria St. was destroyed in a fire. By 1928, however, the diocesan seat had moved to its current location at Huron and Wabash.

Many of the remaining residences surrounding the Church of the Epiphany were converted in the 1920s and '30s into rooming houses and nursing homes. During the 1960s, much of the area was cleared for urban renewal, except for the immediate neighborhood around the Church of the Epiphany which, in 1976, was designated as a Chicago Landmark District.

Richardsonian Romanesque Architecture in Chicago

H. H. Richardson's Romanesque style made a significant impact on architecture in Chicago and throughout the nation. From roughly 1885 to 1900, in Chicago alone, hundreds of public and private buildings were built in this style.

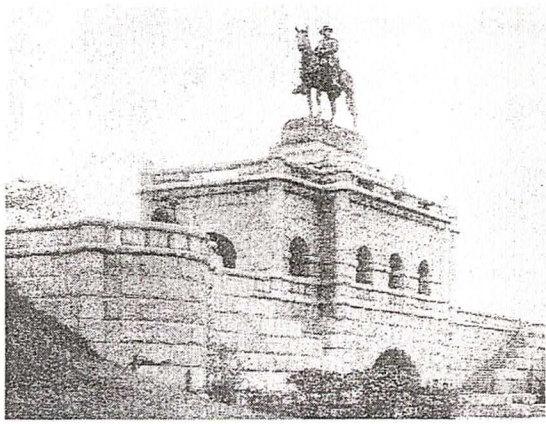
Only three Chicago structures were actually designed in this style by Richardson: the Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87, demolished), the Franklin MacVeagh House (1885-86, demolished), and the John J. Glessner House (1800 S. Prairie Ave., 1886-87). However, their greatly contrasting scales and uses gave local architects highly visible models.

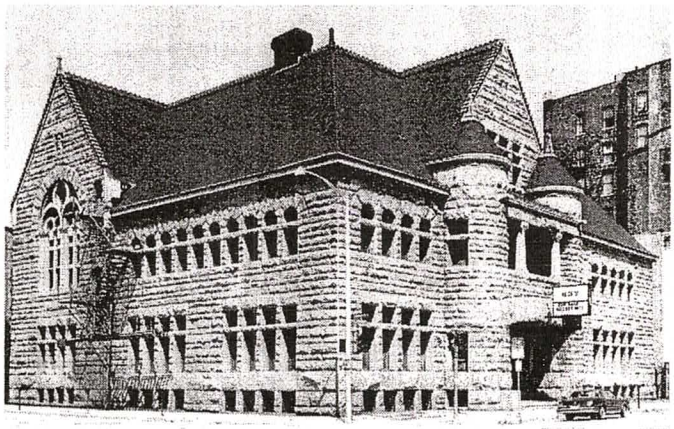
In Chicago, the examples of Richardsonian Romanesque include dozens of public structures, such as railroad stations, schools, cultural institutions, and public

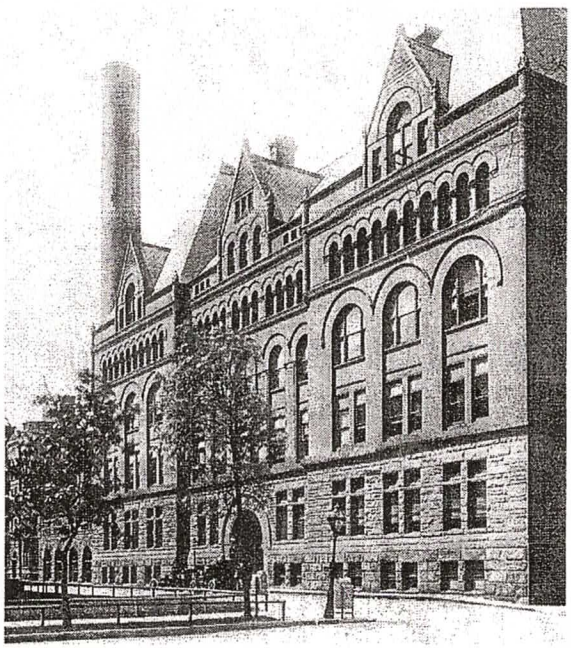
The Marshall Field & Co. Wholesale Store, which was built at the same time as the Church of the Epiphany, stood at the southwest corner of Wells and Adams streets. Designed by H.H. Richardson, it was demolished in 1930 for a parking lot.

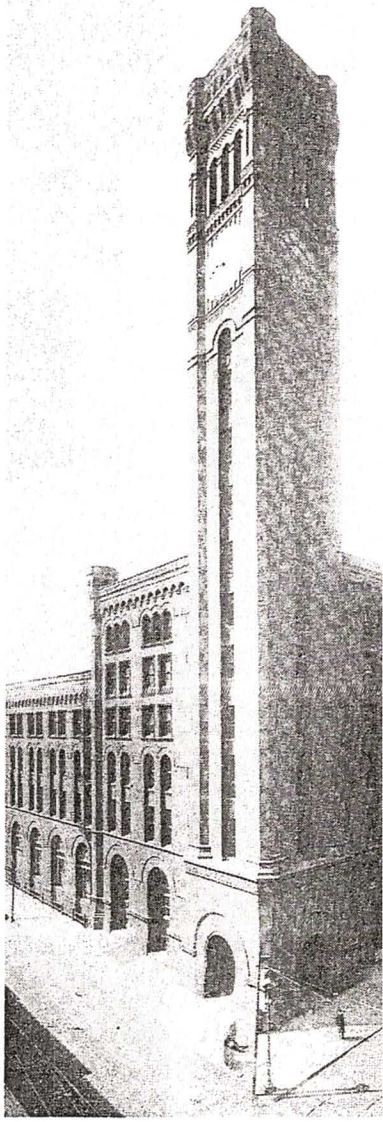
Other notable Richardsonian Romanesque structures in Chicago include (clockwise from right):

- the base for the Grant Memorial in Lincoln Park,
- Grand Central Station (demolished),
- Armour Institute Main Building (now part of the Illinois Institute of Technology), and
- Chicago Historical Society Building.





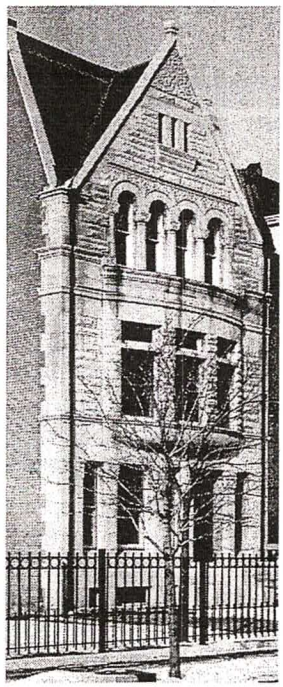


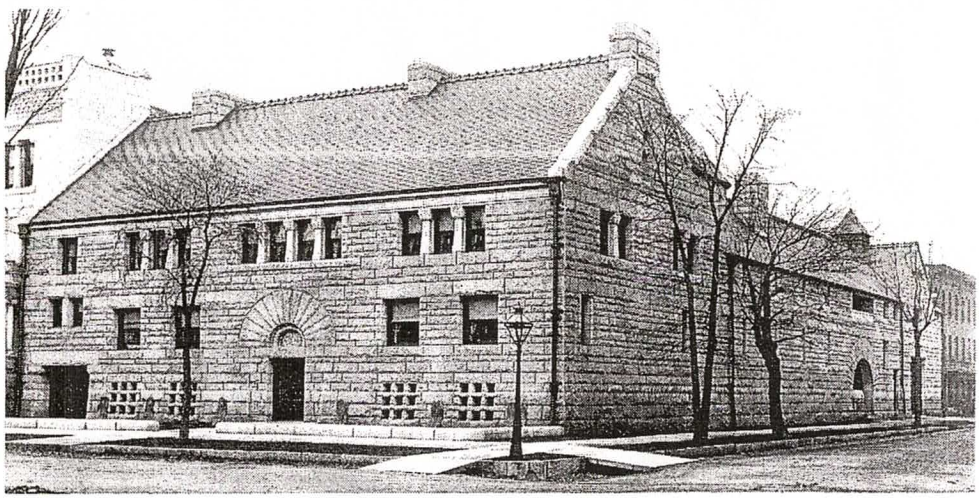


monuments. Among the best known are: the original Art Institute building (1885-87, demolished); Grand Central Station (1889-90, demolished); the Armour Institute Main Building (3300 S. Federal Ave., 1891-93); the former Chicago Historical Society building (632 N. Dearborn Ave., 1890-95); Courthouse Place (54 W. Hubbard St., 1892-93); and the Grant Memorial in Lincoln Park (1886-91), the base of which was designed by the same architects as the Church of the Epiphany.

Residential architecture in Chicago–and elsewhere–also was profoundly affected by the Richardsonian Romanesque. Elements of the style–in particular the use of rough-textured stone and repeating semicircular arches–were incorporated into the designs of literally hundreds of late Victorian-era houses throughout the city. The best examples can be found in such neighborhoods as East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, and North Kenwood.

By the turn of the century, however, the style had run its course in Chicago, due in part to the enormous influence of the classical Beaux-Arts-style buildings at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Jackson Park. Although short lived, the Richardsonian Romanesque style had a profound impact in Chicago, and the Church of the Epiphany remains the city's best example in religious architecture.





The Glessner House (1886-87) was one of two Chicago residences designed by H.H. Richardson. It influenced the style of dozens of buildings in the city, including one at 1532 W. Jackson Blvd. (top right).

Notes

1. O'Gorman, James F., *H.H. Richardson: Architectural Forms for an American Society*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 127.

2. *Inter Ocean*, Dec. 20, 1885, p. 16.

3. Sinkevitch, Alice, ed., *AIA Guide to Chicago*, (New York, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993), p. 275.

APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

The following criteria, as set forth in Section 2-210-620 of the Chicago Municipal Code, should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether the Church of the Epiphany should be recommended for landmark designation.

CRITERION 1

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

Founded in 1868, and occupying its current site at Ashland Avenue and Adams Street since 1886, the Church of the Epiphany has had a long-standing presence on the Near West Side.

Its historic position is underscored by the quality of the church's architecture. The excellence of its design, materials, and workmanship suggest the neighborhood's affluent character from the 1850s through the 1890s. The Church of the Epiphany symbolized the social status of its community when it was built. Today, its architectural distinction, together with the historic association of the congregation with the community, make the Church of the Epiphany a valuable mainstay of the Near West Side.

CRITERION 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

The Church of the Epiphany is Chicago's premier example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in religious architecture. The style was formulated by East Coast architect H. H. Richardson (1838-1886), whose buildings were expressive masonry structures employing broad proportions, bold geometric forms, rough-faced stone, series of semicircular arches, and relatively little ornamentation.

The Richardsonian Romanesque was a dominant architectural style in Chicago for a decade-and-a-half during the late 19th century. The style was used on a broad assortment of buildings, though the quality of designs varied widely.

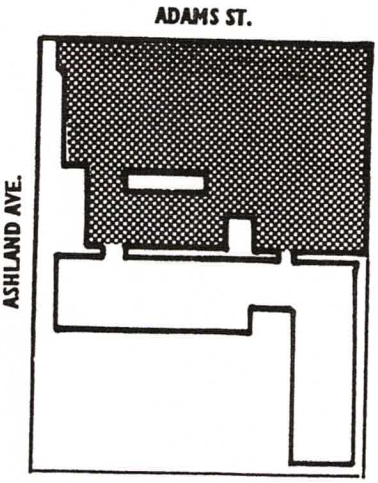
The Church of the Epiphany is one of the most distinguished examples of Richardsonian Romanesque in Chicago, due to the quality of materials and workmanship and the sophistication of its design. It was designed by Edward Burling and Francis Whitehouse, whose firm was one of the first to introduce it to Chicago in the 1880s. This building's success was reflected in the commissions its architects subsequently received to design important Episcopal churches in other Midwestern cities, carrying their interpretation of the Richardsonian Romanesque as far west as Kansas City.

The high artistic quality of the exterior carries through to the vast interior. This space is unified under a broad open-truss roof that establishes its muted, introspective character. The mood is reinforced by subtle coloring and the ornate designs and materials of the ornamental terra-cotta walls, glass mosaics, intricate stone carvings, and the surviving historic stained glass. These elements enrich the space. The rarity of such a distinctive period interior underscores the significance of this church.

CRITERION 7

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

For 110 years the Church of the Epiphany has been a prominent feature of Ashland Avenue and the Near West Side. Its monumental, Richardsonian Romanesque exterior, built of rough-textured brownstone and featuring a massive tower, make it a visual anchor in the community. Along with the Jackson Boulevard Historic District, it forms one of the few surviving concentrations of late 19th-century architecture on the Near West Side.



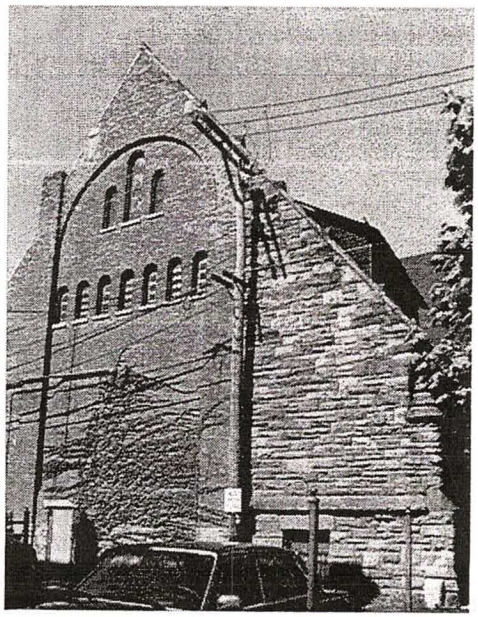
The proposed landmark (shaded area) includes the church and its parish house. The south annex, built in 1957, is not included in the designation.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

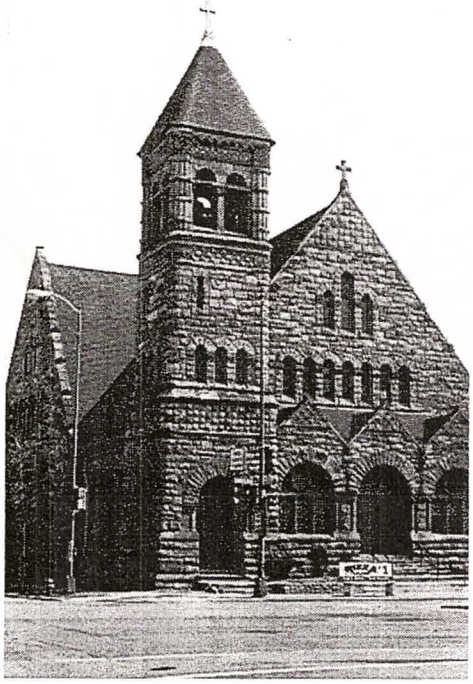
In carrying out its permit review responsibility, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks must review the effect of proposed alterations to "any significant historical or architectural feature" (2-120-770 of the Municipal Code of Chicago). When buildings and districts are under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission identifies these features in order that owners and the public can understand the specific elements that distinguish the landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Church of the Epiphany, the staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features for the preservation of this building be identified as:

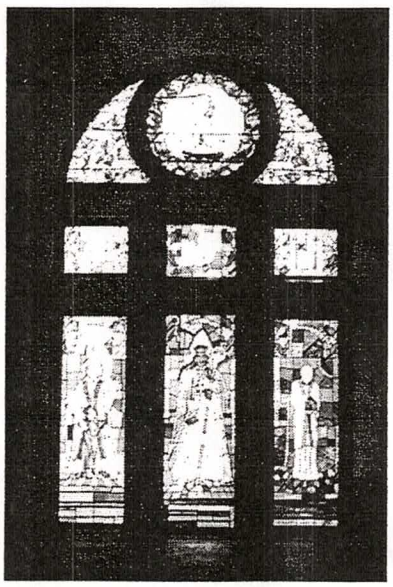
- all exterior elevations and roofs of the church and parish house;
- all interior spaces and features of the church (except the basement); and
- the former "guild hall" on the second floor of the interior of the parish house (excluding all other spaces in the parish house).



The rough-faced stone that was used on the north and west facades of the Church of the Epiphany also wraps around a portion of the east elevation, which faces an alley.



The only major alteration to the exterior of the church has been the replacement of the original slate roof with asphalt shingles (above). Below: a stained glass window by noted Chicago artist Edgar Miller, which replaced one of the original Tiffany windows that were stolen in 1970.



Liturgical considerations may affect future alterations to the church. Permit review procedures will be limited to those changes that are secular in nature.

Guidelines for Permit Review

Once buildings and districts are recommended for designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to review all city-issued permits pertaining to the landmark. The Commission bases its decisions on its "Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction," and its review is intended to protect and enhance the existing significant historical and architectural features.

In general, the exterior appearance of the Church of the Epiphany is unaltered from its construction in 1885, with the following exceptions:

- the loss of many of the original stained glass windows; and

- the replacement of the original slate roof with asphalt shingles.

Any rehabilitation work on the roof would not require restoration of the original slate; replacement asphalt shingles would be permitted.

Any other rehabilitation or restoration work should be done in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, and based on thorough documentation.

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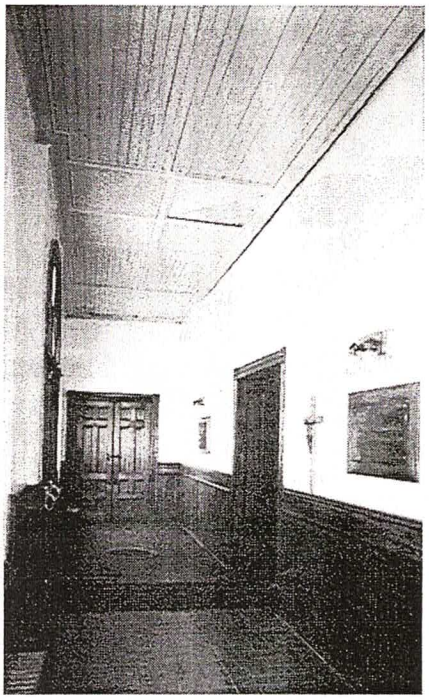

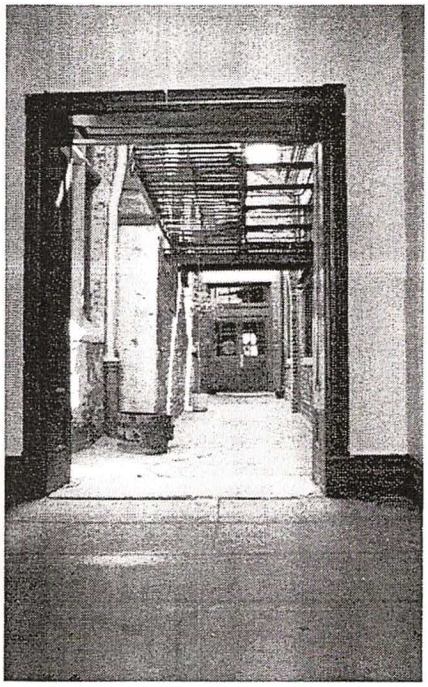

Two other interior features are: (above) the church's entrance vestibule and (below) a passageway between the church and parish house.

Acknowledgments

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Chicago Department of Planning & Development: inside cover, pp. 1, 4, 7, 8 bot., 9, 10-13, 14 rt., 17, 25, 26, 27
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